CHAPTEE III

MIGRATION TO THE CITIES

(1) VOCATION AND DOMICILE

IN conformity witli the general role tliat vocation governs domicile, the Jews who came as merchants from the Near East to Europe, settled in the centres of commerce—in all, or only in the more important towns of the country, according to the level of its economic development. Means of communication determine the size of the self-contained economic unit, and where the requirements of the population have to be met within the immediate neighbourhood, every town, however small, is commercially important.

In the Middle Ages, when road transport was exceedingly difficult and waterways were the arteries of trade, the Jews lived mainly in towns on navigable rivers, and in spreading into Europe, followed the main rivers—the Rhine, Danube, Elbe, and Dniepr (some of their customs even presupposed that their habitation should be near a river). But even these centres of medieval Jewry comprised only a few hundred each, the biggest, a few thousands; and as far into the nineteenth century the greater part of world-Jewry inhabited Eastern Europe, where in the

absence of good means of communication small towns continued to ofier opportunities to traders, during that period the Jews lived predominantly in small towns.

When in the last hundred years networks of roads, rail-ways, and canals were developed in Western Europe, and in Eastern Europe in the last fifty years, small towns steadily lost in importance as centres of commerce. Goods could now, at any time, be obtained cheaply and quickly even from a